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Analysis of North Vietnamese Propaganda Regarding Nam DinhI. Introduction

In their "Report on US War Crimes in Nam Dinh City," the North Vietnamese have released a number of statistics and allegations concerning the US bombing of Nam Dinh in 1965-66. Many of these statements have also been reported in Harrison Salisbury's series of articles in The New York Times. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the veracity of the statistics and allegations presented and to investigate the possibility of developing an alternative methodology for estimating casualties.

Nam Dinh is a textile-producing city approximately 47 miles south of Hanoi normally inhabited by about 90,000 people. Partial evacuation has reduced the population to a reported 20,000. Other than one large and one moderate-size textile mills, Nam Dinh has no major industries. The city is situated, however, along the infiltration-important Hanoi-Vinh Railroad Line. A transshipment facility on a tributary of the Red River makes it possible to transfer goods from coastal craft to the railroad. Nam Dinh is heavily defended by AAA sites. Major targets included in [redacted] for Nam Dinh are the POL storage area [redacted] power plant [redacted] transshipment facility, textile mill complex, railroad yards, and several storage areas.

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Table 1 lists missions against major Nam Dinh targets as reported by US authorities. This is not a comprehensive list of all attacks on Nam Dinh; some armed reconnaissance missions against the city are not reported in

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sufficient detail to be included.\* Six of the dates of raids reported by the North Vietnamese agree with the US list, while raids reported by the North Vietnamese on five other dates do not appear on the US list. Apparently substantial civilian casualties did not occur on dates of US raids not reported by the North Vietnamese -- 2-4 July 1965, 28 April 1966, 13 May 1966, 12 June 1966, and 16 August 1966.

## II. Analysis of North Vietnamese Charges

### Propaganda Statement

"The April 14, 1966 air raid over Hang Thao Street (Silk Street) was one of the biggest deliberate US attacks on human lives. ...killing 49 people, ...wounding 135 people."

### Comment

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On 14 April 1966, 8 US A4 jets attacked the Nam Dinh Transshipment Facility [ ] with 8 2000 pound bombs. This facility consists of a narrow strip of wharf area and support buildings along the river bank and is served by a rail spur. Directly behind it is a provincial warehouse and a densely populated residential area, presumably occupied by workers from the nearby textile plants, rice mill, and food processing plant.

Post strike photography reveals that most of the 2000 pound bombs fell within an area 500-1000 feet northwest of the target in the densely populated civilian residential-residential commercial area. While other raids have caused civilian casualties in this and other areas of Nam Dinh, both US and

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\*Arthur Sylvester, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, announced that Nam Dinh has been struck 64 times since mid-1965.

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and North Vietnamese sources indicate that this raid was the most damaging from the civilian casualty standpoint. Although it would be nearly impossible to bomb the transshipment facility without causing some civilian casualties and damage, the reasons for such serious bombing errors are unclear. Efforts to evade heavy defensive fire from AAA sites may have been a contributing factor. In addition, it is possible that pilots may have been attempting to suppress small arms fire from rooftops in the civilian area. Poor weather over the target could also have been a factor.

#### Propaganda Statement

"...881 dwelling houses (accounting for 13 percent of the city housing) with an area of 86,847 square meters were destroyed, leaving 12,464 homeless."

#### Comment

Analysis of 12 October 1966 post strike photography of Nam Dinh reveals that approximately 65,140 square meters of roof cover within one nautical mile of the center of town were destroyed or severely damaged. This amounts to 12.7 percent of the total civilian-residential and residential-commercial roof cover within one nautical mile of the center of Nam Dinh. By selecting a typical housing block as a sample of the number of distinct structures per unit of roof cover, it was estimated that the average amount of roof cover per building was 59.7 square meters. Using this estimate, approximately 1090 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged. In addition, it is likely that many other dwellings received substantial damage not discernable from photography.

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Propaganda Statement

"The US imperialists also attacked the dike surrounding the city in an attempt to sabotage the peaceful work of the population."

Comment

The river banks are diked all the way through the city of Nam Dinh. Consequently, it would be impossible to strike the Transshipment Facility or POL Storage Facility on one bank or the ferry landing on the other without risking some damage to dikes. The North Vietnamese do not claim any casualties or severe damage from dike breaches.

Propaganda Statement

"During the 33 above said air attacks against Nam Dinh, ...89 persons were killed, ...and 405 wounded...."

Comment

These casualty estimates do not appear exaggerated. Based on casualty experience from the World War II bombing of Japan, post strike estimates of civilian casualties (includes both killed and wounded) range from 272 if there was prior warning up to 2720 if no warning was given. In a breakdown (see Table 1) of 6 separate major raids on Nam Dinh and an adjacent hamlet, the North Vietnamese list a total of 91 killed and 207 wounded.

III. Estimation of Civilian Casualties

North Vietnamese propaganda statements on Nam Dinh can be used for developing a methodology for estimating civilian casualties. Much of the

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propaganda released by North Vietnam appears to contain gross exaggerations with respect to civilian damage and casualties as well as downings of US planes. However, some North Vietnamese statements appear to be accurate with respect to damage and casualties. This is particularly true of damaged areas that are frequently shown to foreigners as "proof of US atrocities."

In the case of Nam Dinh, a multi-variable casualty relationship can be developed which includes the following information:\*

Nam Dinh

<u>Population of Target Area</u>	<u>Total Casualties</u>	<u>Roof Cover of Target Area (million sq. ft.)</u>	<u>Total Area Damaged or Destroyed (million sq. ft.)</u>
20,000	494	5.5	.7

This relationship states that the number of casualties is equal to the percent of roof cover destroyed or damaged times the population times a "casualty experience factor." Because casualties in Nam Dinh are known, the relationship can be solved for the casualty experience factor -- a factor that can be applied to areas of other cities which have sustained civilian damage in order to estimate civilian casualties.

Phu Ly, about 32 nautical miles south of Hanoi and also located on the Hanoi-Vinh Rail Line and Route 1A, has been struck repeatedly since 1965. The city contains a number of important transportation and military targets. Strikes against the railroad yard and port facilities resulted in almost

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\*This relationship may be expressed mathematically:  $C = f\left(\frac{xy}{z}\right)$  or  $C = \frac{kxy}{z}$ , where C=casualties, k=constant, x=roof cover damaged, y=population of entire target area, and z=total roof cover of target area. The relationship may be solved for any civilian casualties in any given urban target area with a constant, k=.19, which reflects bombing casualty experience in Nam Dinh. It is necessary, however, to continue to re-examine k=.19 as further reliable information on civilian casualties in North Vietnamese cities becomes available.

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complete destruction of the most heavily populated area of the city as well as extensive damage to other civilian areas. The following table illustrates the estimation of civilian casualties using the Nam Dinh experience.

Phu Ly

<u>Population</u>	<u>Roof Cover of Target Area (million sq. ft.)</u>	<u>Total Area Damaged or Destroyed (million sq. ft.)</u>	<u>Predicted Civilian Casualties</u>
5,000	.588	.355	575

Using the current methodology employing Japanese casualty experiences, casualties would range from 173 to 1730.

The suggested casualty relationship based on the Nam Dinh bombing has two important advantages over the currently used method. First, it utilizes actual bombing experience in North Vietnam rather than World War II experience against Japanese cities. Secondly, it provides a single number estimate rather than a very broad and sometimes useless range. The casualty relationship does have, however, several drawbacks. It is necessary to have estimates for population and total civilian roof cover for each city which has sustained civilian bomb damage. Population data for North Vietnam is quite unreliable due to conflicting evacuation claims. The methodology may be applied only to cities that have been struck a number of different times in order that large differences in amounts of casualties per raid due to the presence or absence of warning, preparation, air raid defense, and so forth may be assumed to "wash out."\*

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\*It would be possible, however, to develop a series of different "k's" to reflect various levels of warning and preparation if sufficient casualty information were available.

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IV. Conclusions

The statistical information concerning damage to civilian areas in the North Vietnamese "Report on US War Crimes in Nam Dinh City" is accurate. Total damage claims fall remarkably close to estimates based on post strike photography. Furthermore, reported casualties fall within casualty estimates made by use of the World War II Japanese bombing experiences. However, no basis exists to evaluate North Vietnamese statements regarding total sorties flown or ordnance expended against Nam Dinh as US data on armed reconnaissance strikes against fixed targets are not always complete.

The North Vietnamese have carefully distorted US target intentions; attacks on the Nam Dinh Transshipment Facility and the Nam Dinh POL Storage Area were reported as attacks on workers' housing and dikes. No mention was made of attacks on the Thermal Power Plant, the POL Storage Area, the Railroad Yard, or the Transshipment Facility. In addition, no mention was made of heavy anti-aircraft defenses.

Nam Dinh citizens are unlikely to perceive a small river port area, an electric power plant, or a textile mill as being military targets; the damage caused by the 14 April 1966 raid would not likely be interpreted as bombing error due the distance from clearly identifiable military targets.

It is significant to note that a substantial share of the civilian casualties and damage to civilian areas inflicted on Nam Dinh occurred in only two raids -- 13 April and 18 May 1966. These raids, both on the Transshipment Facility, caused 208 civilian casualties. Indeed, it is unlikely that

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civilian casualties could have been avoided in attacking this target because of its proximity to heavily populated areas. All of the other 62 raids combined caused 286 casualties, an average of only 4.6 casualties per mission. Furthermore, at least five of the US-reported raids were apparently carried off without any significant civilian casualties. Although these raids were against such major targets as the POL storage and railroad yard and involved large amounts of ordnance, the North Vietnamese did not even refer to them in their propagandas statement even though the statement mentions raids in which as few as one person was killed.

The case of Nam Dinh supports the conclusion that air strikes can be carried off against targets on the outskirts of major North Vietnamese cities without prohibitive civilian casualties or damage. However, raids against targets which directly border on heavily populated areas cannot be struck without accepting the risk of substantial casualties and damage, despite enemy efforts to evacuate a sizeable portion of the civilian population.

Experiences gleaned from the Nam Dinh bombings can be used to develop a "Vietnamese experience factor" useful in estimating civilian casualties in other cities. For purposes of estimating casualties in North Vietnamese cities this methodology has advantages over the one now in use. However, it requires more base data than the currently used method and should be "updated" as more reliable casualty intelligence becomes available.

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Selected Air Strikes Against Nam Dinh, 1965-66

Date of Strike		Target		Ordnance	Casualties
As reported by US	As reported by NVN	As reported by US	As reported by NVN		
28-29 Jun 1965	28 Jun 1965	Power Plant	Textile workers' housing	15x250#	10 killed, 12 wounded
2- 4 Jul 1965	NR	POL Storage Area	NR*	9x1000#	NR
2- 4 Aug 1965	4 Aug 1965	Power Plant	NR	44 Bullpups 38x2.75" Rockets	NR
12-15 Sep 1965	12 Sep 1965	POL Storage Area	Textile Complex	86x250#	6 killed, 28 wounded
13 Apr 1966	14 Apr 1966	Transshipment Facility	Hang Thao St. (Silk St.)	8x2000#	49 killed, 135 wounded
28 Apr 1966	NR	Railroad Yards	NR	13x1000#	NR
13 May 1966	NR	Railroad Yards	NR		NR
18 May 1966	18 May 1966	Railroad Yards	Hoang Van Thu St.	116x500#	13 killed, 11 wounded
31 May 1966	31 May 1966	Railroad Yards, Transshipment Facility	Dikes	121x250#	NR
12 Jun 1966	NR	Railroad Yards	NR	76x250#	NR
NR	4 Jul 1966	NR	NR	NR	1 killed, 11 wounded
NR	14 Jul 1966	NR	Dikes	NR	NR
NR	20 Jul 1966	NR	Dikes	NR	NR
NR	30 Jul 1966	NR	Phu Long Hamlet (NE of Nam Dinh)	NR	12 killed, 10 wounded
NR	31 Jul 1966	NR	Dikes	NR	NR
16 Aug 1966	NR	POL Storage Area	NR	6 Bullpups	NR
*Not Reported		TOTAL			91 killed, 207 wounded

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<p><b>Remarks:</b></p> <p>Attached for your review is <span style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 100px; height: 20px; vertical-align: middle;"></span> report on Nam Dinh.</p>					
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